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ABSTRACT

The relationship between state government and higher education institutions is discussed. It is noted that, by and large, state governments have left colleges alone until the past two decades. State intrusions have taken the form of accountability statutes, budgeting, performance audits, program review, minimum standards, sunset laws, and more powerful state governing boards. Because of changing demographic, economic, and social trends, the public still wants proof of better management in higher education. Such demand should be limited to appropriate topics and should be expressed through a mechanism sensitive to both public and institutional interests. Both society and higher education would be assisted in this oversight partnership by an attitude adjustment, better staffing, adequate information, and improved communication. Higher education's best chance is in candid assessment of the problems that lie ahead and in frank discussion of the decisions. Six current events affecting California's community colleges are described that are departures from the past treatment of this sector. These developments include the following: a reduction for the curriculum of about $30 million; a narrowing of the community college mission; a plan to implement tuition; and basing state aid on new standards. (Author/SW)

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ABSTRACT: NAILING JELLO TO THE WALL

by

Dan Angel
President, Citrus College

Forum: What Progress are the States Making in Initiating Higher Education Reform?

By and large, state governments have left colleges alone until the past two decades and recent encroachment has not been even in the fifty states.

State intrusions have taken the form of accountability statutes, budgeting, performance audits, program review, minimum standards, sunset laws, and more powerful state governing boards.

Because of changing demographic, economic and social trends, the public still wants proof of better management in higher education.

Such demand must be limited to appropriate topics and must include a sensitive mechanism. Society and higher education itself would be assisted in this oversight partnership by an attitude adjustment, better staffing, adequate information, and improved communication.

Higher education's best chance is in candid assessment of the problems that lie ahead and in frank discussion of the decisions that must be made.

To some extent, assessing the partnership between state centralism and institutional autonomy will always be like nailing jello to the wall.

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Dan Angel
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presented to the
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Minneapolis, Minnesota
October 15, 1982

Some time ago there was a couple who weren't getting along well. Therefore, they went to see a marriage counselor. The counselor listened very carefully to the woman as she described her situation. She went on for several minutes and finally the counselor told her, "You are right."

A few minutes later he had her husband in the office and they went through the same kind of discussion. At the end of the discussion the counselor looked at the husband and said, "You are right."

Well, that was fine, except the counselor's wife was listening outside and she came in and said, "I don't understand this. You told the husband he was right and a few minutes before that you told the wife she was right."

The counselor looked at his wife and said, "You are right."

That story demonstrates the uneasy governance relationship that exists between institutions and government. Both think they are right. Probably all parties are to some degree.

The Way It Was

Lyman Glenny and Frank Bowen in their excellent study, State Intervention in Higher Education, summarize many years of past history dealing with state intervention. "By and large, state governments have left colleges and universities alone over the greater part of their existence."[1]

Kirst[2] says that most of the intervention has taken place in the last two decades. He indicates that unprecidented growth of state influence started in the 1960's. Hal Geiogue,[3] a Legislative Analyst for the California Legislature, indicates the 1970's saw the strongest gains in terms of state intervention.

The next logical question is, "What kind of efforts at intervention have we had?"

Millard[4] presents data showing forty-eight states involved in approval of institutions of higher education. Harcleroad concludes that "the retrenchment expected for 1975-90 has already resulted in a change of direction for state planning."[5]

A 1979 State Education Commission of the States report identifies six specific approaches seeking state accountability; (1) performance budgeting, (2) performance audit, (3) state program review, (4) voluntary accreditation, (5) minimum standards for licensure and approval, and (6) sunset laws. The report concludes that presently thirty-eight states have a legislative audit and nine have legislative evaluation. New program review was undertaken by forty states and twenty-two have reviewed existing programs.[6]

Bill Pickens, Director of Fiscal Analysts for the California Postsecondary Education Commission, traces the movement toward accountability in state budgeting. Pickens says, "Despite their variety, all formulas for higher education were all part of an evolution toward accountability in the state budget."[7]

Although state intervention can be either direct or indirect, further efforts at accountability are usually structurally oriented. Glenny and Bowen report significant changes between 1960 and 1976. Statewide voluntary higher education agencies

went from 5 to 1. Statewide governing boards went from 15 to 19. Regulatory coordinating agencies went from 5 to 19, and advisory coordinating boards went from 5 to 9.[8]

The Future

If you look into the crystal ball of T. Edward Hollander, this message will appear, "The issue for the decade ahead is no longer whether or not states will use their power to require increased accountability, to initiate more budget review, and seek influence over what colleges teach and to whom--only how they are going to use it."[9]

I suspect that most of you are, like me, directly concerned with these recent signs of state encroachment. I imagine you have constant pangs of anxiety like I do and experience a high degree of uncertainty and frustration--much like trying to nail jello to the wall!

Let me share some current events effecting California's community colleges--a system of 107 colleges in 70 districts that enroll 1.3 million students. Although efforts at a state structure started back in 1960 with the California Master Plan, until 1974 not a great deal had been done to make it a formal system. The fact is, however, that the direction has crystalized in the last year or so and the pace has definitely quickened.

Let me site six different activities that are occurring in California which give reason for concern and alarm:

(1) In July of 1982, the California community colleges were directed by the state legislature and the California Postsecondary Education Commission to pare some $30 million in specific courses from their curriculum.

(2) The Board of Governors (a group of fifteen people appointed by the Governor and approved by the Senate who set policy to some degree in community colleges) appears to be getting more active. The Board of Governors are now in the process of narrowing the California community college mission. An August 31, 1982, report speaks in terms of statewide priorities and drops eight separate areas from priority status (meaning zero or partial funding from the state.)

(3) A contingency fee plan is now being readied for 1983-84. The California system has always been tuition free but now CPEC and the legislature seem to be demanding a fee system.

(4) The Board of Governors is now reviewing the sixty-odd minimum standards that have been developed since 1968. For the first time, local districts will get state aid based upon standards with "real teeth".

(5) An information system plan is now in the offing. It is scheduled for approval in December and even the Chancellor's Office admits, "This will not occur without some basic changes in the relationship of the community colleges office and that of the local districts."[10]

(6) A new planning and evaluation process will be "tested" over the next two years. Thus comprehensive planning, by specific format, complete with visitation and inspection will become a fixed part of the future governance plan.

Needless to say, all of these changes are bold departures from the past treatment of the community college system in California by both the state and its agencies.

Whether these are "good" or "bad" is a subject of hot debate in California.

Perhaps these changes will provide: (1) better information, (2) more uniformity, (3) less duplication, (4) long range planning, and (5) higher quality.

On the other hand, the structural changes may bring; (1) state agency bias, (2) further loss of local control, (3) a drastic narrowing of the curriculum, (4) reductions in studert access, and (5) severe restraints on the community college mission and function.

Most likely, some of the positive plus some of the negative will accompany these changes.

Schmidtlein and Popovich find four broad goals for state involvement in postsecondary education. They are: (1) access, (2) diversity, (3) quality, and (4) economy.[11] By this criteria, California community colleges (and probably much of the rest of the nation) now seems to be playing postsecondary policy roulette with access, diversity, and quality waged upon the wheel of our economically stringent era fortunes.

Barak and Berdahl isolate the key dispute in their fine 1978 study, State Level Academic Program Review in Higher Education, when they conclude that, "The real issue with respect to institutional autonomy and accountability is not whether there will be intervention by the state, but whether the inevitable

demands for increased accountability will be confined to the proper topic and expressed through a mechanism sensitive to both public and institutional interests.[12]

Glenny and Bowen note the importance of the executive the legislature and their respective staffs, but conclude that: "State higher education agencies are the most important agencies by which the state intervenes in higher education."[13]

It would appear then that our best alternative is to try to build a sensitive mechanism or a sensitive state agency. How can that be done?

I suggest four ways:

(1) **Attitude Adjustment**

Since government regulation has only recently developed with comparative force among colleges and universities, academicians (all of us) are fairly quick to get our noses out of joint. We resent any intrusion at all into "our affairs" and we don't mask our feelings very well. We have an attitude problem. <u>It is high time that we accept what we already know--that the autonomy of institutions of higher education neither can be nor should be complete. The public has a fair interest in their conduct</u>.

(2) Quality Staffing

Since the growth of state oversight can be correlated closely with the increasing staff size of executive, legislative and coordinating agencies, it is tempting to conclude that higher education would be better off with less staff or staff who have little interest or expertise in the postsecondary world. Indeed, that has been a part of our past.

Tempting, but foolish! Adequate staff who understand and have some solid academic credentials will be a major part of improving the future.

(3) Informational Needs

While red tape, redundant, nonrelevant data should be relegated, this is no time for "blind-man-on-the-freeway" leadership. We live in an information age, and management at all levels must have timely, accurate, and comprehensive hard data upon which to base its difficult and strategic decisions. We should reason that intelligent persons examining the same data will have a better chance at reaching a common conclusion.

(4) Communications

Although as Howard Bowen[14] so capably points out, the past thirty years of higher education achievement is "by any count remarkable," there is no question that public support of higher education enterprise has dissipated. There are signs that may be recovering a bit, but it is certainly a lot less than it was. What good then does it do for us to point an accusing finger at the state agencies and for them to do the same to us? We are going to have to work together if we are going to revitalize higher education.

Stephen K. Bailey[15] made three noteworthy observations in 1978 that seem to put the public-private turfdom issue in its proper perspective:

(1) "Look not forward in fear nor backward in anger, but around in awareness."

(2) "The essence of democracy is compromise."

(3) "In the future, higher education will receive the kind of governmental treatment that it deserves."

Bailey's words are encouraging in some respects and alarming in others. But, we as educators, particularly in higher education

will be forced to continue with our efforts at nailing jello to the wall.

I suspect that the 1980's will demand better quality materials, eight penny rather than four penny nails, more determined workers, and a much, much bigger hammer!

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FOOTNOTES

1. Lyman A. Glenny and Frank M. Bowen State Intervention in Higher Education. (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), p. 1.

2. Michael W. Kirst, The State Role in Education Policy Innovation. (Stanford: Stanford University School of Education Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance, 1981), p. 1.

3. Harold E. Geiogue, "An Increased Role for the States," Change, October, 1980, p. 19.

4. Richard M. Millard, "Authorization and Oversight," in Perspectives on Postsecondary Education: An Annotated Bibliography, (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1981), p. 13.

5. Fred F. Harcleroad, "Other State Agency Matters Including Statewide Planning and Program Evaluation and Audit," in Perspectives on Postsecondary Education: An Annotated Bibliography, (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1981), p. 39.

6. Accountability and Academe, a Report of the National Task Force on the Accountability of Higher Education to the State, (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1979), p. 39.

7. William H. Pickens, "What's Ahead for Higher Education," in a presentation before the National Association of College Auxiliary Services in Reno, Nevada, November, 1981.

8. Glenny and Bowen, loc. cit., p. 20.

9. T. Edward Hollander, "The View From the Capital," Change, June-July, 1978, p. 43.

10. Chuck McIntyre, "Information System Plan," unpublished paper, Office of the California Community Colleges, September, 1982, p. 3.

11. Frank A. Schmidtlein and Joseph P. Popovich, "Higher Education Finance Issues in a Period of Transition," (MS: Maryland Board for Higher Education, 1978).

12. Robert J. Barak and Robert O. Berdahl, State Level Academic Program Review in Higher Education, (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1978), p. 7.

13. Glenny and Bowen, loc. cit., p. 22.

14. Howard R. Bowen, "Some Agenda for Higher Education," in Addresses and Proceedings. (Oakland: Western College Association, 1982), p. 14.

15. Government Regulation of Higher Education. (Buffalo: State University of New York, 1978), p. 27.